

# Healthy living for diabetes in pregnancy

## **Nutrition and Dietetics**

### **Patient Information Leaflet**

#### **Introduction**

This leaflet is for women who are pregnant and have diabetes. It gives information on being healthy during your pregnancy.

#### **Why is healthy eating important during pregnancy?**

Eating well during pregnancy will help you and your baby to get the nutrients you need to be healthy. It will also help you to manage weight gain and keep your blood glucose (sugar) readings within target.

#### **What is carbohydrate?**

Carbohydrate is an important part of our diet because it gives us energy. Food and drinks containing carbohydrate are broken down into glucose in our gut. The glucose then moves into our blood.

It is important that you can identify carbohydrate in your diet. There are two types of carbohydrate: starches and sugars. Here are some examples:

- Starchy carbohydrate includes rice, chapati, pasta, potato, bread, noodles, yams and breakfast cereal
- Starchy carbohydrate is also found in starchy vegetables and pulses such as baked beans, lentils, sweetcorn and parsnips
- Natural sugars are found in fruit, fruit juice, milk and yoghurt
- Added sugar is in sugary food such as cakes, chocolates, biscuits and sweets and sugary drinks

## Carbohydrates in pregnancy

If you have diabetes in pregnancy, eating a lot of carbohydrate in one go may cause your blood glucose level to rise above target. You can help to keep your blood glucose levels stable by eating regular meals. It may be helpful to spread out your carbohydrate intake by reducing the mealtime serving and eating a small snack between meals.

Choosing a different type of carbohydrate may also help to keep your blood glucose level within target. Some carbohydrate breaks down into sugar slowly, resulting in a steady rise in blood glucose. Carbohydrate that releases glucose slowly is said to have a low glycaemic index (GI).

The table below gives some ideas about healthy choices that could help you to lower the GI of the carbohydrate in your diet:

Food	Healthy choices
Cereal	Porridge, All Bran*, wheat biscuits, Shredded Wheat*, Special K*
Bread	Granary, multigrain, seeded and rye bread, white and whole wheat tortilla wraps, wholemeal pitta bread, chapati
Potato	New potatoes including skins, sweet potatoes
Rice	White (long grain), basmati and brown rice
Pasta	Most types cooked al dente which means it is still quite firm
Other sides	Noodles, couscous, quinoa (a seed that looks similar to couscous and is high in fibre and protein), yams
Snacks	Fruit, yoghurt, popcorn

\* and the equivalent supermarket own brand

Here is an example of how someone could make dietary changes to help keep their blood glucose levels within target:

<b>Before</b>	<b>After</b>
<p><b>Breakfast</b> Cornflakes and milk Small banana</p>	<p><b>Breakfast</b> Porridge made with milk</p> <p><b>Mid-morning</b> Small banana</p>
<p><b>Lunch</b> Ham salad sandwich (white bread) Small packet of crisps</p>	<p><b>Lunch</b> Ham salad sandwich (granary bread)</p> <p><b>Mid-afternoon</b> Small packet of crisps</p>
<p><b>Evening</b> Chicken and vegetable stir fry with six tablespoons of rice</p>	<p><b>Evening</b> Chicken and vegetable stir fry with four tablespoons of rice</p> <p><b>Supper</b> Small pot of yoghurt</p>

## Healthy weight gain

It is important to keep an eye on your weight gain during pregnancy. On average, women tend to gain seven to 18kg (roughly one to three stones) in weight.

Table 1 provides guidance about weight gain during pregnancy according to your pre-pregnancy body mass index (BMI).

Body mass index (BMI) indicates how healthy your weight is compared to your height. You work it out by dividing your weight in kilograms (kg) by your height in metres squared (m<sup>2</sup>):

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{weight (kg)}}{[\text{height (m)}]^2}$$

Example:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Weight} \quad \underline{70\text{kg}} \\ \text{Height} \quad \underline{[1.70\text{m} \times 2]} \end{array}$$

$$= \frac{70\text{kg}}{3.40}$$

$$= \text{BMI of } 20.6$$

You can also use the BMI calculator on the NHS Choices website as follows:

<http://www.nhs.uk/tools/pages/healthyweightcalculator.aspx>

**Table 1 – weight gain during pregnancy according to pre-pregnancy BMI**

Pre-pregnancy BMI (kg/m <sup>2</sup> )		Healthy weight gain (kg)
Underweight	Less than 18.5	13 – 18
Normal weight	18.5 – 24.9	11 – 16
Overweight	25.0 – 29.9	7 – 11
Obese	30 or more	5 – 9

## Vitamin D

It is suggested that women who are pregnant (or breastfeeding) take a supplement containing vitamin D. Vitamin D regulates the amount of calcium and phosphate which is needed for strong bones and teeth. The recommended dose is 10 micrograms per day. **Please check that the supplement is safe for use in pregnancy.**

## Folic acid

It is recommended that women with diabetes should take a high dose of folic acid (5mg per day) for three months before conception and during the first trimester of pregnancy. This should be prescribed by your GP.

## Calcium

It is important that you and your baby have enough calcium, for strong bones and teeth. It is recommended that you eat calcium-rich food two to three times a day.

Here are some examples of calcium-rich foods for people who can eat dairy products:

- One third of a pint of milk
- Small pot of yoghurt
- Small, matchbox-sized piece of cheese

Other non-dairy foods that are good sources of calcium include:

- Plant alternatives to dairy food with added calcium e.g. soya milk
- Broccoli, cabbage and okra
- Tofu
- Nuts
- Anything made with fortified flour, such as bread
- Fish with bones such as sardines and pilchards. Please note that it is recommended that pregnant women eat no more than two portions of oily fish a week

## Iron

It is important that you and your baby get enough iron. If you are short of iron, this can lead to tiredness and anaemia. Good sources of iron should be eaten daily. Here are some examples:

- Lean meat
- Beans, such as kidney beans
- Nuts
- Palm-sized portion of dried fruit
- Whole grains such as brown rice
- Breakfast cereal with added iron
- Dark green leafy vegetables including watercress and curly kale

## Food safety

When you are pregnant, it is important to be more careful about food safety such as washing food, vegetables and salad carefully to remove all traces of soil. The soil may contain toxoplasma, a parasite that can cause toxoplasmosis which can harm your unborn baby. You can find detailed information on the NHS Choices website listed under the section 'Can I find out more?'

## Activity

Regular mild to moderate activity is recommended as it will help you to keep your blood glucose within target. Antenatal activity classes are a great way to keep fit and meet other mums-to-be. If you would like more information about these classes, please ask your community midwife.

## Can I find out more?

- NHS Choices website provides information about healthy living during pregnancy and gestational diabetes:  
<http://www.nhs.uk/Pages/HomePage.aspx>
- Diabetes UK website provides information about gestational diabetes:  
<http://www.diabetes.org.uk/gestational>

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics on 01384 244017 (8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday)

**This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/patient-information-leaflets/>

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 0730510**

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